**Sample theme analysis paragraph of Thomas Wolfe’s “The Far and the Near”**

Thomas Wolfe’s “The Far and the Near” uses the binary opposition between appearance and reality to demonstrate that the true nature of the world is often much darker than our own idealistic visions of it. For more than twenty years, the engineer blows his train whistle every day as he passes the cottage, and ‘‘every day, as soon as she heard this signal, a woman had appeared on the back porch of the little house and waved to him.’’ Although he has seen the woman—and later the two women—do this from afar, the engineer nevertheless allows his mind to fill in the gaps about how the women might appear up close. In his mind, he crafts these assumptions about the women’s appearance into an idealistic vision, in which he feels very connected to them. The narrator reports, ‘‘He felt for them and for the little house in which they lived such tenderness as a man might feel for his own children.’’ As the years pass, this vision builds in strength, until the engineer feels that he knows ‘‘their lives completely, to every hour and moment of the day.’’ However, when he meets the women face to face, his vision is shattered. The reality is that, even though the two women have waved to him from afar, up close they are suspicious and fearful of him. Also, while he has imagined their beauty, when he comes face to face with the woman who owns the cottage, he sees that her face is ‘‘harsh and pinched and meager,’’ and her flesh sags ‘‘wearily in sallow folds.’’ When the engineer finally leaves the house of the two women, he realizes as he is walking away that he has allowed himself to be fooled by a distant appearance. Now, he can see ‘‘the strange and unsuspected visage of the earth which had always been within a stone’s throw of him, and which he had never seen or known.’’